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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Fifteenth session
15 January-2 February 1996

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Hanna Beate SCHÖPP-SCHILLING (Germany)

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

6. Report submitted on an exceptional basis

Rwanda

1. The representative of Rwanda made an oral presentation, on an exceptional basis, at the 306th meeting of the Committee, on 31 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.306). She expressed appreciation for the interest the Committee was showing towards her country. She pointed out that Rwanda had reported four times to the Committee on progress in improving the status of women before the tragic and dramatic events, which included not only four years of war since 1990, but unprecedented genocide, with the massacre of an estimated one million people. There had been violations of human rights on a massive scale.

2. The representative pointed out some of the social, political and economic consequences of the events in her country, including physical, psychological, moral and spiritual destabilization of the population, total destruction of the structures of the State, and an economy which is now dominated by humanitarian

assistance. She pointed out that there had been systematic destruction of the means of production and public services.

3. The representative explained that efforts were under way to address the problems of the country and the effects of the genocide including rehabilitation for those most affected in the population.

4. In describing the particular situation of women, she provided information on the total inadequacy of medical services, the extent of chronic malnutrition, the lack of clean water and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, noting that women and girls were particularly vulnerable and that, between the ages of 14 and 40, the incidence of maternal death and infant death had increased substantially. They were also suffering from severe psychological effects; anxiety and depression were common.

5. Regarding education, women and girls were particularly affected by the damage to the educational system resulting from the war, as the customs and traditions had previously placed women and girls at a disadvantage and there had been no possibility for improvement under the circumstances.

6. She provided information on the small number of women in political life and noted factors that prevented women from playing a more active role in political decision-making, including poverty and lack of access to information.

7. The representative summarized efforts to promote women, such as economic empowerment, greater sharing of responsibilities among men and women, better social services, legal reform and protection for young women, but emphasized that such efforts were contingent on the rebuilding of the country.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

8. The Committee expressed appreciation that the distinguished representative of the Government of Rwanda was able to make the oral presentation, taking into account the extremely difficult situation of her country. This was indicative of the commitment to the advancement of women in the country, even during this difficult period of the post-genocide situation. The Committee expressed its solidarity and sympathy with the people of Rwanda, particularly the women and children.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

9. The Committee identified as major factors and difficulties in implementing the Convention: (a) the weak State machinery to effectively maintain the peace process, including national reconciliation efforts; (b) the breakdown of mutual support systems; (c) the large number of Rwandan refugees and internally displaced persons; (d) the great number of militias and some civilians who are still armed; (e) the shattered economy and extreme poverty.

Positive aspects

10. The Committee noted with appreciation the establishment of the committee of inquiry to investigate the genocide of 1994 to ensure justice for the perpetrators and safety and rehabilitation for survivors.

11. The Committee commended the Government for initiating a reconciliation process.

12. The Committee welcomed the attempt made by the Government to rebuild infrastructure and the economy.

13. The Committee commended Government's efforts to rehabilitate traumatized people, both physically and psychologically, to enable them to regain their lost image.

14. The Committee noted with interest the establishment of a women's promotion office, which is under the Prime Minister's office, as well as a focal point to provide legal assistance, peace, education and the development of gender-sensitive programmes.

Principal subjects of concern

15. The Committee noted with deep concern the extreme poverty that prevailed and the decimated economy, which allowed very little funding for medical assistance for the survivors of the war.

16. The Committee was dismayed with the massive rape of women and girls during the genocide, which has resulted in widespread HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This can of course eventually lead to further illness and death for thousands of women and girls.

17. The Committee expressed great concern at the continual supply of arms to the militia which could seriously obstruct the peace process.

18. The Committee noted with concern the prevailing customs, which make women inferior to men.

19. The Committee expressed concern at the high rate of illiteracy, particularly among women.

20. The repatriation of refugees from neighbouring countries is an issue of concern to the Committee.

Suggestions and recommendations

21. The international community, including all United Nations agencies and Governments, must give massive support for poverty alleviation and education programmes aimed at eliminating human rights violations and rehabilitating Rwanda.

22. The Government should support women's quest for equal rights and their contributions in all areas of society, particularly in the reconciliation process and maintenance of peace.

23. The International Tribunal for Rwanda must be equitably constituted and must have a focus on women's rights.

24. There must be a witness protection unit in the war crimes prosecutor's office to protect those who testify about rape and other crimes.

25. The monitoring unit of the Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda must be educated and trained about sexual assault, rape and mass rape. It is highly commendable that the monitors are appointed with an emphasis on diversity of experience and familiarity with Rwanda's culture and language, and, indeed, many more should be women.

26. A thorough investigation of rape and sexual assault, as had been done on the former Yugoslavia, must be conducted.

27. The Government must put in place legal provisions that would advance women's reproductive and sexual rights, land titles to women and the right of women to be their children's legal parent guardian.

28. The Committee recommends immediate implementation of resolution 1995/5, entitled "Situation of human rights in Rwanda", as well as resolution 1995/14, entitled "Systematic rape and sexual slavery during periods of armed conflict", of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

29. It is necessary to organize a consensus-building discussion concerning the repatriation of Rwandan refugees and internally displaced persons. The international community should only encourage repatriation of refugees when there are clear signs from inside Rwanda that suggest such action.